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The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Towards Differentiated Configurations

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Integrated Solutions to Protracted Displacement –
A Humanitarian/Development/Peace Nexus Approach

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List of Acronyms

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCR	Global Compact for Refugees
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
KUNO	Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWoW	New Ways of Working
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Abstract

This paper examines and problematizes recent conceptualizations of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus, which has been proposed as a comprehensive response to protracted crises and, in particular, protracted displacement. It is based on a literature review and primarily addresses those organizations currently experimenting with the idea of nexus programming. The paper aims to encourage a more differentiated debate about the HDP nexus. For that purpose, four aspects that deserve further inquiry are fleshed out and tentatively sketched as determinants for a variety of potential nexus configurations. First, the common conceptualization of humanitarian aid, development and peace as sectoral *silos* is problematized as it emphasizes separations and disregards overlaps. Attention is drawn to ideological differences within each of the three sectors, as they illustrate that differences between and overlaps of humanitarian, development and peace objectives, activities and outcomes are organization specific. Second, inter- and intra-organizational perspectives on the HDP nexus are distinguished, as they provide starting points for *bridging* and/or *breaking* the silos. Third, the disregard of contextual particularities in conceptualizing the nexus is problematized, calling for further exploration regarding the conditions that enable or prevent a nexus approach in a specific context. Fourth, and related to the former, it is argued that the substance of nexus configurations needs to become a more prominent element in the debate. Answers need to be found not only for how the HDP nexus can be pursued, facilitated and institutionalized but with which activities and outcomes it can be substantiated. In conclusion, the paper acknowledges the potential of the HDP nexus to encourage thinking beyond distinct spheres of competence and intervention but warns against the conceptualization and proliferation of a nexus-blueprint.

Keywords

Triple nexus; protracted crises; protracted displacement; silos

Bio

Sebastian Weishaupt holds an MSc in International Development Studies from Wageningen University in the Netherlands. His research interest is focused on humanitarian aid and forced displacement. As a Research Intern, he worked with UNRISD on the project “Integrated Solutions to Protracted Displacement - A Humanitarian/Development/Peace Nexus Approach”.

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The HDP Nexus: A Comprehensive Response to Protracted Crises?

While there is no single agreed definition of protracted crises, the term usually describes environments in which “a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of their livelihoods over a prolonged period of time” (Macrae and Harmer 2004:1), mainly due to perpetual and recurring conflicts and disasters (FAO 2010:12). Afghanistan, which has experienced decades of war as well as frequent weather-induced disasters such as floods and landslides, is an illustrative example of the complex and wide-reaching consequences of protracted crises, not least because the country has been among the largest producers of displacement (Schmeidl 2019). Political considerations as well as limited capacities of states affected by conflicts, disasters and displacement often impede potential pathways out of crises and contribute to its protracted nature (Macrae and Harmer 2004:4). The government of Sudan, for example, has rejected local integration as a large-scale durable solution for forcibly displaced persons (UNDP and UNHCR 2015), while the government of Uganda demonstrated its willingness to support and integrate displaced people, despite its lack of capacities. Due to these and other circumstances, durable solutions for people affected by conflict, disaster and displacement are often absent, forcing them “to live in limbo, their lives on hold” (Aleinikoff 2015:1). In an attempt to address the causes and effects of crises, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations intervene in such protracted situations, aiming to save lives, alleviate suffering, mitigate risks and pave the way for durable solutions.

Since “protracted crises have become the new norm” (UN 2015), the need to address the challenges that these situations entail is a prominent concern in the international community. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “the average length of crises with an active inter-agency appeal rose from four to seven years” between 2005 and 2017 (OCHA 2018a:2).¹ As a result of this trend, “close to 90% of humanitarian aid is now going to protracted crises” (OECD 2019). However, humanitarian aid *alone*, that is life-saving emergency relief without long-term prospects for development and peace, is, for various reasons, an insufficient response to protracted situations. Perhaps most importantly, the quality of life enabled and institutionalized by the minimum standards of emergency relief creates dependencies and undermines people’s dignity (Anderson et al. 2012).² Besides that, permanent basic service provision is understood to be the primary responsibility of governments, instead of the international community. Due to these and other concerns, humanitarian organizations, which are usually the first international actors to respond to conflicts, disasters and displacement, are reluctant to provide basic services such as food, water, shelter and protection for an

¹ Climate change might further aggravate this trend as regions are permanently rendered uninhabitable.

² It should be noted that occasionally for aid-recipients, the minimum standards of humanitarian aid imply an improvement in their quality of life. For example, internally displaced persons’ (IDPs) access to education in Colombia increased subsequent to their displacement (Ferris and Winthrop 2010:36). Contrary to that, Weizman (2012) has shown how the minimum standards of humanitarian aid can also be instrumentalized to institutionalize a quality of life at the threshold to what is still acceptable, which he understands as a form of “humanitarian violence”.

indefinite period of time. Therefore, a debate about options to hand-over and phase out “quasi-permanent state[s] of emergency” (Chkam 2016) has emerged.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus is the most recent proposition for a comprehensive response to protracted crises and has been piloted in a variety of contexts, particularly in protracted displacement situations.³ According to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the nexus aims to strengthen “collaboration, coherence and complementarity” between humanitarian, development and peace interventions “to reduce overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict” (OECD 2019:4). As such, a nexus approach might be applicable to any context in which humanitarian aid, development and peace interventions are required. The meaning and scope of these three fields of intervention are, however, highly contested. Peace, for example, can be framed in a negative or positive sense, referring to the absence of war and violent conflict or the prospect for peaceful and sustainable development (IASC 2020). Following a positive framing of the peace pillar, an HDP nexus approach could be applied in situations where conflict is merely a possibility or risk, while a negative framing of the peace pillar would limit its applicability to situations of active conflict. Pilots of the nexus in protracted displacement situations in relatively stable refugee contexts such as Turkey (Perret 2019) and Uganda (Jones and Mazzara 2018) point towards a positive framing of the peace pillar, while pilots in conflict-prone countries such as South Sudan (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019; Wilkinson et al. 2019) and Mali (Perret 2019) suggest a negative framing. Overall, the nexus pilots highlight the broad and almost universal application of the HDP nexus to different situations of protracted crises, which will be problematized in this paper by pointing towards divergent conceptualizations of the HDP nexus.

Looking back at previous attempts to respond to protracted crises points towards some of the challenges of connecting humanitarian aid, development and peace. *Early recovery*, which promotes the “application of development principles to humanitarian settings” (UNDP 2008), and *Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development* (LRRD), which envisions a transition from emergency relief to stability and long-term development prospects (Mosel and Levine 2014), are only two examples of such attempts.⁴ Since the alignment or collaboration with overtly political development and peace actors can compromise the supposedly *neutral* and *impartial* position of humanitarian organizations, many humanitarians have rejected such concepts (Macrae 2019; Pedersen 2016).⁵ Nonetheless, the debate about the HDP nexus has recently gained considerable momentum

³ The EU has piloted the HDP nexus (with limited success) in Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Myanmar and Iraq (Jones and Mazzara 2018). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has tested a nexus approach in Colombia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and Turkey (Perret 2019). Other organizations have also explored the applicability of the nexus in South Sudan (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019; Wilkinson et al. 2019), Ethiopia (Ndeda and Birungi 2018) and elsewhere.

⁴ For a genealogical examination of the HDP nexus, see Macrae (2019).

⁵ Guinote (2018) argues that the purpose of interventions and an organization's modus operandi are the most suitable criteria to differentiate humanitarian and development actors. Since humanitarians operate in protracted crises, address needs beyond immediate physical survival, and negotiate with governments and belligerents, timeframe, types of activities and state-/people-centredness are not reliable identity markers.

and initiated renewed thinking and strategic processes in various organizations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and other international strategic guidelines support the ambition of a more holistic and interconnected response to crises and UN Secretary General António Guterres made the HDP nexus a central element of the UN agenda (UN 2017, 2016a).⁶ Therefore, a closer examination of the conceptualization and applicability of the nexus stands to reason.

Recent conceptualizations of the HDP nexus are commonly based on the assumption that humanitarian aid, development and peace frame three distinct and clearly demarcated *silos* that separate specific actors, activities, objectives and budget lines. Even though various concepts with distinct implications for the practices of intervening actors have been proposed to operationalize the nexus, there is no overarching consensus. Whether a nexus response to protracted crises should be facilitated through “collaboration, coordination, linkage, alignment, complementarity, operationality, reconfiguration, fusion, integration or joined-upness” (DuBois 2020:6) is still subject to debate. Departing from this controversy, this paper starts from the assumption that the disagreement about the meaning and objective of the HDP nexus is partly related to its unspecific, almost universal, application. It will be argued that protracted crisis is a category too broad for the development of a practicable concept. While some sort of complementarity between humanitarian aid, development and peace might be advisable in any protracted crisis, differentiation in terms of the configuration of this complementarity is required. Acknowledging the overarching potential of the HDP nexus to encourage thinking beyond distinct spheres of competence and intervention, the paper warns against a nexus-blueprint and advocates for differentiated nexus configurations.

In what follows, the recent conceptualization(s) of the HDP nexus are examined and problematized by drawing attention to aspects that deserve clarification and further inquiry. The examples underpinning the arguments in this paper are drawn from protracted displacement situations, which have also been primarily targeted by recent nexus pilots.⁷ The issues raised in this paper are, however, assumed to apply not only to the conceptualization of the HDP nexus for protracted displacement situations, but to protracted crises more generally. The aim of this paper is to encourage a more

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